



Eurozine Review

Le Monde diplomatique (Berlin) lambasts the Italian Left; *BiŠtter* considers the dialectic of secularization; *Kulturos barai* wonders what Lithuania wants to do with its freedom; *Arena* smells something fishy in the Swedish debate on reproduction; *Osteuropa* finds Russia at the crossroads; *Multitudes* observes the US bring the war home; *Le Monde diplomatique* (Oslo) maps the spread of refugees; *Revolver Revue* journeys back in time to the end of the night; *Host* records the silence of the monasteries; and *Merkur* listens to the music of the spheres.

Le Monde diplomatique (Berlin) 4/2008



As Silvio Berlusconi's Popolo della Libert  (Freedom Folk) party gains a clear victory over Walter Veltroni's Partito Democratico (Democratic Party) in the Italian elections, the biggest losers have been the Sinistra Arcobaleno (Rainbow Left), who are not expected to get a single candidate into parliament.

On the basis of Rudi Ghedini's scathing pre-election critique of the Rainbow Left in the German edition of *Le Monde diplomatique*, that's no surprise. The members of the alliance, writes Ghedini, have paraded their political goals "like a fetish" to conceal their inability to achieve results. Furthermore, they've been fractious and concerned only with staking out their political turf, in order, after the elections, "to carry on as before".

"The alliance must be clear that an emergency exists in Italy", writes Ghedini. Italian society is so paralyzed by social inequality that the research institute Censis has compared it to the "suffocating mud" that gathers on the Adriatic coast. The Rainbow Alliance will not be able to oppose effectively unless it abandons its closed doors policy and "proves that it is attractive to the fifth party: the non-affiliated Left".

The death of a superhero: "Whoever doesn't read comics won't have gathered: Captain America is dead." Last year, [reports Dietmar Dath](#), the long-serving American comic hero met his end in an American civil war. The problem is: who outside America cares?

"A country that is primarily interested in questions of security becomes neurotic, tortures itself, blames itself, then lapses into sentimental mania and whimsy. For better or for worse, the arts, and above all the popular arts, must capitulate if they don't want to fall victim to a lack of domestic demand, which is still more important to Hollywood than the world market."

The full [table of contents](#) of *Le Monde diplomatique* (Berlin) 4/2008

BIŠtter fŷr deutsche und internationale Politik 4/2008



Jŷrgen Habermas, writing in *BIŠtter*, characterizes "post-secular society" as "the awareness that living in a secular society is no longer connected to the certainty that cultural and social modernization advances at the expense of the public and personal significance of religion." It is this awareness that has given rise to the battle between multiculturalism and "Enlightenment fundamentalism".

Yet "the universalist claim of the political Enlightenment does not contradict remotely the particularist sensibilities of a correctly understood multiculturalism", argues Habermas. In the same way that the constitutional revolution of the eighteenth century released members of Calvinist and Catholic subcultures into a common political body in which they could still maintain their cultural identity, so today the neutrality of the state "does not speak against allowing religious statements in the political public sphere, so long as institutionalized [...] decision making processes [...] are clearly separated from the informal participation of citizens in public communication."

The Mafia state: The discussion of Kosovo's declaration of independence has overlooked the fact that Kosovo is *the* centre for organized crime in the region, comments Dusan Reljic. The EU's decision to set up a rule of law mission in Kosovo will bring it into direct confrontation with criminalized state structures. Whether it will act any differently from the UN, which has opted to drop corruption investigations in the interests of political stability, remains to be seen.

The only way to break down criminal clan structures in the region is to improve economic prospects, says Reljic. "The quickest and most effective contribution the EU can make to the long-term pacification of Kosovo and the region is to open its labour market to migrants from the western Balkans."

Also too look out for: A letter written by Rudi Dutschke in 1975 in which he outlines his critique of the Soviet Union; and Clemens Heni on why historian Gŷtz Aly has got it wrong about the '68ers.

The full [table of contents](#) of *BIŠtter fŷr deutsche und internationale Politik* 4/2008

Kulturos barai 3/2008



As Lithuania celebrates the ninetieth anniversary of the 1918 declaration of independence — and prepares for the twentieth anniversary of its independence from the Soviet Union — poet Marcelijus Martinaitis asks if the Baltic state really knows what it wants to do with its freedom. "We still lack a vision of how we should reform science and education, of what image of ourselves we want to offer to the world, of what we are going to plan, and of what we are going to build." No one, writes Martinaitis, "will be interested in us until we have found an agreement among ourselves of what we want to do".

The state of Lithuanian literary criticism: In a cutting article entitled "Who's afraid of postcolonial studies?", [Almantas Samalavicius](#) describes Lithuanian literary criticism as "conservative in a bad sense". At conferences, Lithuanian literary scholars and critics constantly talk about the need to develop new tools for interpreting and analyzing texts, but when it comes to applying new methods on the study of Lithuanian literature they are extremely reluctant. Still, postcolonial studies has entered the Lithuanian domain and it has come to stay, writes Samalavicius.

The decline of Baltic studies: A number of Lithuanian scholars are concerned about the decline of the academic field of Baltic studies in Germany. Responding to an appeal made by German Baltic scholars, they conclude that they can do very little to change the situation in another country: "But we have to do whatever we can to help people researching Baltic cultures [...] we have to establish more contacts, be more receptive to works published abroad, and use all available channels of communication to further the publishing and understanding of Baltic studies as broadly as possible."

Nietzsche today? As part of a project supported by the Next Page Foundation (Sofia) aiming to promote translation between eastern European languages, *Kulturos barai* publishes the conversation "What does Nietzsche mean to philosophers today?" from Slovakian journal *Kritika & Kontext*.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Kulturos barai* 3/2008

Arena 2/2008



Not all women long to give birth or nurse children. In a themed section on motherhood, Annelie Jordahl points to the fact that the feminist project has too long belonged to procreating women. The experience of childless or childfree women trying to get their bearings in a society where the nuclear family prevails is rarely described. "Who", asks Jordahl, "is really aware that that too is a 'female

experience'?"

To equate *woman* with *mother* is just one example of the obsession with "the natural" that dominates public discourse on gender and reproduction, as well as much of the feminist debate — despite Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler. "There's something fishy about the Swedish view of reproduction", writes Jordahl. "It should happen *naturally*. Biology should take its course. It's not really okay to help someone along. Lesbian and single women go to Denmark for insemination. Older women boost their diminishing fertility in Finland or the US. In Sweden we're stuck in a way of thinking concerned with biological purity that has a very shabby history. The naturally functioning body and the holy child with its biological parents are put on a pedestal. Why don't more feminists protest against this way of thinking?"

The globalization movement and '68: [Magnus Wennerhag](#), editor of Eurozine's Malmö-based partner *Fronesis*, makes a guest appearance in *Arena* with a long article on the politics of global social movements. Today's social movements have some things in common with those coming out of the '68 protests, he writes, but also some clear differences. While the '68 movements "criticized the idea of political representation and the separation of public and private as a state-centred type of politics" that cannot account for "inequalities

appearing outside the state", today's activists put the emphasis differently. They instead defend public and political institutions against global processes and privatization. (An English translation of Wennerhag's article will shortly appear in Eurozine.)

The full [table of contents](#) of *Arena* 2/2008

Osteuropa 2/2008



Dmitri Furman, writing in *Osteuropa*, refutes the myth that the economic upturn in Russia after the recession of the Yeltsin era is thanks to Valdimir Putin and instead puts it down to post-Soviet society's adjustment to its new circumstances (aided by the rise in oil prices). Likewise, Furman contests the claim that Putin has set Russia on a new confrontation course with the West. Yeltsin's opposition to the expansion of Nato was no less vehement than Putin's, while the West reacts increasingly sensitively to Russian interference in neighbouring states.

In fact, argues Furman, political developments in Russia in the past decade—and-a-half have nothing to do with the personality of the president. Rather, both Yeltsin and Putin have been the instruments of an inexorable political process set in motion by the "original sin" of the Belavezha Accords in 1991. The accords authorized the dissolution of the USSR without a democratic mandate and thereby condemned subsequent presidents to rule by "imitated democracy".

Putin's decision to obey the constitution and step down after two terms has given Russia a chance to depart from that path of development:

"Of course, this doesn't mean that democracy will dawn tomorrow and that all dangers have been banished. Inevitably, there will be a critical moment in the future when, for the first time, someone will be voted in as president who has not already been designated as such before the vote. However, after Putin's decision to respect the constitution, [...] the chances have improved that this critical moment will be the last before the breakthrough to a genuine democracy."

Boom or bust? At current rates of growth, Russia will be among the richest five nations in the world by 2016. Yet the boom, driven by ever higher oil prices, is leading to an appreciation of the rouble. This limits export possibilities for industry and in turn puts a dampener on the economy — an effect otherwise known as "Dutch disease". Whether a stabilization fund created as a corrective will succeed is debatable, writes Roland Gštz.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Osteuropa* 2/2008

Multitudes 32 (2008)



Jean-Claude Paye describes the way in which the notion of war has entered US criminal law via the war on terror. The Military Commissions Act (2006) inscribes war permanently into criminal law, changing both its content and application. The category "unlawful enemy combatant" allows the American state to declare its political opponents as enemies, while denying, in the name of "the fight between good and evil", the political character of its actions. "By merging the enemy and the criminal, the law merges external and internal sovereignties."

Cognitive capitalism: Taking the the publishing industry as an example, Cristina Morini and Andrea Fumagalli examine how the networking and learning activities characteristic of "cognitive labour" lead to the individualization of labour and wages and to precarity in terms of income and social security.

Also to look out for: [Toni Negri](#) on the transformation of salary relations and the reappropriation of welfare.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Multitudes* 32 (2008)

Le Monde diplomatique (Oslo) 4/2008



In a double-spread on refugees, *Le Monde diplomatique* (Oslo) outlines the difficulties in estimating the number of refugees worldwide. "My colleagues and I waited at customs to count all the people crossing the border and thus assess the immediate need for aid, [...] we were expecting 20 000 people in the course of the day, and we had the same counters used by air hostesses to confirm the number of passengers on a flight. We registered between 20 and 30 thousand per hour!" tells William Spindler, spokesperson for the UNHCR, about the genocide in Rwanda in 1996.

This is an example, though extreme, of the refugee situation worldwide, writes Philippe Rekacewicz. There are hundreds of thousands of people who have the right to international status as refugees but who remain unaccounted for. Even with a system for registering people set up in the reception country, many fear for their lives if they register.

Refugees of liberty: As a result of worldwide economic liberalization, ever more people are forced to move for work, blurring the distinction between economic refugees and others. Jan Ziegler writes about how the EU's international trade politics help sustain and increase the ever growing stream of refugees whose livelihoods are crushed by big corporations. They buy up production rights from heavily indebted countries, forcing the local producers out of the market and making them consumers of products they can't afford. To control the influx of economic migrants this creates, the EU uses the agency FRONTEX. This agency was created as an independent body "tasked to coordinate the operational cooperation between member states in the field of border security", according to their own website.

A curiosity: Remi Nilsen writes about *Ruhnama* (Book of the spirit) written by Saparmurat Nijazov, the dictator of Turkmenistan until his death in 2006. Bizarrely, this book has been translated into more than 40 languages, all in the

name of securing trade agreements with the oil-rich country.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Le Monde diplomatique* (Oslo) 4/2008

Revolver Revue 70 (2008)



The very first translation of Louis-Ferdinand Celine's *Journey to the End of the Night* was into Czech, reveals Anna Kareninová in *Revolver Revue*. Exactly 75 years ago, Celine happened to come to Prague for the first time. There he met the German filmmaker Karl Junghans, who had directed German and Czech films, including *Takový je život / Such is Life*. Having seen the film in France and admired it greatly,

Celine had a spontaneous idea for collaboration: "Although I do not understand [film] and am not sure whether a film could be made of it, I know that you are the only director in the world who could film *Journey to the End of the Night* according to my conception." Like many of the best ideas, it never came to fruition.

Also to look out for: Vladimír Mikulka reviews Vaclav Havel's new play *Odchazejí*; and an extract from František Storm's *Typography Notebook*.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Revolver Revue* 70 (2008)

Host 3/2008



The times when thinkers, writers and artists used to spend their lives behind the walls of monasteries are long gone, write the editors of *Host* in the introduction to a themed section on art(ists) and monasteries. The importance of ecclesiastical institutions has significantly decreased, and the artists associated with this lifestyle have long since left the hemmed-in milieu of monasteries. The monasteries,

however, still exist: they stand aloof, but they keep striving for the goals determined thousands of years ago.

Now a new generation of artists are discovering the monastic life. Why? Perhaps, ponders *Host*, "these authors and artists perceive monasteries as the cradle of European creative thinking and assume that a creative person has a lot in common with a monk in his or her goals and means".

Host focuses on three authors who have had, in different times and places and in different ways, dealings with monasteries. Besides the recollections of the photographer and filmmaker Petr Franc, there are excerpts from the work of the English writer Patrick Leigh Fermor and a portrait of the German filmmaker Philip Gröning.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Host* 3/2008

Merkur 4/2008



In *Merkur*, [Jens Hagedstedt](#) has some interesting things to say about what distinguishes "serious" (classical) and "popular" music:

"Popular music talks to us at the level of the 'self', as people with histories, suffering, and 'escapedness' (which is how Adorno described happiness), as people with bodies, the last bastion of the self."

This doesn't mean that serious music is all about selflessness: "proportionally, there are probably as many egocentrics among listeners of serious music as there are among listeners of pop." What, then, *does* define receptivity to serious music?

"It's more a matter of an ability to 'see' and 'hear' [...] that always accompanies intelligence, without being reducible to it. Many childhood prodigies [...] are also highly gifted in mathematics and/or languages. Their artistic talent lies above all in what one would call 'spirituality': an intuitive knowledge about how one is part of the cosmos — a knowledge whose content we can comprehend particularly clearly when it is glaringly absent, when [...] people think about what exists beyond them in the cosmos in a particularly uncomprehending way."

Also to look out for: Andreas Kuhlmann contrasts Thomas Mann's and Wilhelm Furtwängler's understanding of "German culture"; [Burkhard Mÿller](#) discusses Franz Kafka's animal parables; and Detlev Schöttker asks why the postwar reconstruction of German cities plays such a minor role in German literature.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Merkur* 4/2008

Published 2008-04-15
Original in English
© Eurozine